

## *Keynote "University of California System"*

### *Comment*

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When it comes to the University of California, I must confess to a certain amount of ambivalence. As everybody knows, there is a deeply felt rivalry between Stanford and the University of California that goes back well over a hundred years now, and every self-respecting Stanford person has a sacred commitment to hating our rivals across the San Francisco Bay – especially where football is concerned (and believe me: football is important in American academia). Having been associated with Stanford for 46 years now, I obviously share that commitment and always feel a bit like entering enemy territory when I cross the Bay Bridge into Berkeley.

At the same time, my sense of fairness makes me admit that both of my children received an excellent education at the University of California – my youngest son a B.Sc. from UC Riverside, and my oldest son a PhD in Economics from UC Berkeley.

This kind of cognitive dissonance notwithstanding, however, I don't hesitate to share with you my strong belief that the California system of public higher education is one of the greatest success stories in higher education – not only in the U.S., but around the world – and I am pleased to take this occasion to extend my warmest congratulations to Provost Pitts and his colleagues on this year's Nobel Prize in Physics being shared by one of Berkeley's faculty, Saul Perlmutter.

Larry Pitts has nicely pointed out some of the elements of that strength as well as the dangerous predicament in which public higher education finds itself in California as well as in the rest of the United States. My own fear is that what we are talking about in America these days is not just a crisis of public education, but much more broadly a crisis of public institutions – as part of a seriously contested controversy over the role of the state in American society.

It is truly amazing that the University of California manages to maintain its excellence in both research and teaching under these dire circumstances, and I don't think any German university president would want to switch jobs with Larry Pitts.

Given the interest of this conference in questions of regional cooperation in higher education, let me offer three observations on the California system of higher education.

1

One of the most remarkable and, indeed, ingenious characteristics of the California system of higher education is what Pitts calls its "rational delineation of function and admissions pools" and what is perhaps better described as its "segmentation" into three different and sharply defined tiers (the ten campuses of the University of California, the 23 California state universities and the 112 Community Colleges): a system of vertical differentiation where each tier or segment has its own autonomy in institutional mission,

in governance, in funding, in staffing, and in student admission. In many ways, that arrangement has contributed to the strength and the identity of each segment, and It has allowed the system of higher education in California to sustain both the world class research achievements at places like Berkeley and UCLA as well as the wide open access for hundreds of thousands of community college students. At the same time, however, this kind of firm segmentation has also been a significant hindrance to regional cooperation, to the sharing of facilities and services and to the coordination of program offerings across the three segments (a point already made by the California Citizens Commission on Higher Education in 1999<sup>1</sup>, and still largely valid). In other words: The very autonomy of each segment makes the joint mobilization of institutions in all three tiers for the benefit of a particular region that much more difficult. There is a potential lesson here for Germany where there clearly is a trend – induced in part by such devices as the “Exzellenzinitiative” – towards a segmentation of its own in higher education.

2

Many discussions about the University of California system (and here I speak only of the uppermost segment, the 10 UC campuses) see the UC as a prime example of a distributed system of higher education where there is a certain division of labor across, and perhaps a corresponding degree of collaboration among, the university’s 10 campuses. I believe Larry Pitts has made it quite clear in his presentation that, even if such a distributed feature may have played a role in the original Master Plan for higher education in California, it never really worked out that way. For all practical purposes, each campus of the UC is a university in its own right, each with a broad spectrum of disciplines in its research and teaching program, and each mightily competing with the other campuses (as well as with Stanford) for excellent students, excellent faculty, and financial resources. In other words: A multi-campus university does in and of itself neither guarantee optimal divisions of labor nor a particularly efficient sharing of services and facilities between the different campuses. Sociologists have a term for this – they call it “mission creep” – an institution’s slow, persistent expansion of its turf – or, as the 1999 report on the UC system put it, “the expensive, prestige-seeking efforts of campuses to expand their scope”; I could entertain you for quite a while with examples of similar tendencies in Germany.

From the point of view of some of this conference’s premises, therefore, the University of California does not provide a particularly suitable role model for the kinds of plans that are being discussed in, for example, the state of Saxony or the state of Brandenburg where universities are encouraged to have their own profile that is not necessarily

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<sup>1</sup> California Citizens Commission on Higher Education, *Toward a State of Learning: California Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century*. Los Angeles: Center for Governmental Studies, pp. 23-24; 50-54.

duplicated in the state's other universities. (My prediction is, incidentally, that the UC may have to start thinking in this direction if, as one must expect, the financial situation will remain as dire as it now is.)

3

I do not mean to distract from the extraordinary research accomplishments of the University of California or the excellent advanced education that the California State Universities have provided to hundreds of thousands of Californians when I point out that one of the greatest success stories in Californian higher education has been written by its third tier – the community colleges. I say this for two reasons, both of which relevant to the development of higher education in Germany, even though the first one is slightly outside the purview of this conference. This first reason refers to the fact that many of the community colleges have become very successful models of regional cooperation in the sense of close interaction with the economic needs of their particular region. Nowhere has this been more obvious than in Silicon Valley, where community colleges like Foothill or de Anza College have become true partners in jointly designing the kind of programs on which Silicon Valley companies depend for their middle level human resource needs.

The second aspect of that success story points to a kind of institutional cooperation that is strangely absent from the agenda of this conference, namely, the cooperation between schools and universities. The community colleges, particularly in California, have provided a remarkably successful transmission belt between secondary and post-secondary education – particularly for children from families that are more remote from the educational mainstream (“bildungsferne Schichten” in Germany). Indeed, the major beneficiaries of this openness in California are students from minority populations, especially Hispanics. I happen to think that the transition from school to university in Germany is one of the most critical bottlenecks in German educational development, and that the bridging function of the Community Colleges in the U.S. provides an extraordinarily instructive and helpful experience in this regard. It is also quite conceivable that similar transitional arrangements in Germany would much more effectively tap the talent reserves in migrant and rural populations that still are largely left out of the access routes to higher education in Germany.

4

Let me add one point that goes beyond regional cooperation in a narrower sense but provides some important complementarities. I am talking about what one might call “inter-regional cooperation”. Just as regional cooperation seeks to optimize the higher education resources within one region, inter-regional cooperation seeks to make unique higher education resources more widely available across different regions. Let me illustrate this with one of my own university's projects – the plan to establish a Stanford campus not in the San Francisco Bay Area or in California, but in New York City. This project goes back to an initiative by the mayor of New York City, Michael Bloomberg, who invited major American research universities to make proposals for setting up a campus

in applied science on Roosevelt Island in the East River in New York City. Stanford, together with a number of other universities, has taken up the challenge and submitted a plan for such a campus, and we expect a decision by the end of the year. At this point, it looks like Stanford and Cornell are the principal contenders.

The reasoning for Stanford's decision to get involved in this project is interesting. As Stanford's president, John Hennessy, sees it, there is a need for a "world-class model for the multi-campus university" that deliberately seeks out locations not just across a state, but across the country (and potentially across the world) – a logical extension, if you will, of the original idea of the University of California, but on a world-wide scale.

I do believe, by way of conclusion, that the university of the future will have a dual personality: a local or regional personality and a global personality; a Californian or Ruhr identity and a transnational identity; a culture of proximity and a culture of worldwide sharing and interaction.

It's a very exciting and stimulating vision as we think about the future of higher education, but it also is a formidable challenge for higher education leadership to keep those two cultures together and have them enrich each other.